

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSC-05 SS-15 CPR-01 /032 W

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R 060705Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0831

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0823

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, PPDC

SUBJ: CONDOLENCE MESSAGE

REF: A) STATE 74919, B) LIBREVILLE 687, C) STATE 51848

1. BECAUSE OF RATHER UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVING HELICOPTER INCIDENT AND SEQUEL, I HAVE HESITATED TO TRANSMIT MESSAGE AGREED UPON IN REFTTEL (A). GABON HAS NOT OFFICIALLY DECLARED PASSENGERS DEAD AND MAY NEVER DO SO. GROUND SEARCH IN FACT STILL CONTINUING.

2. THUS I HAVE FEARED THAT FOR US TO SEND STRAIGHT CONDOLENCE MESSAGE WHICH ASSUMES THAT PASSENGERS ARE NO MORE, MIGHT NOT ACCOMPLISH ITS INTENDED OBJECTIVE IF IT WERE TO TOUCH A SENSITIVE NERVE. ACCORDINGLY, IN EFFORT TO GET HANDLE ON SITUATION IF POSSIBLE, I DISCUSSED MATTER WITH FRENCH AMBASSADOR DELAUNEY IN HIS CAPACITY AS DEAN OF CORPS MORNING APRIL 5. DELAUNEY SAID HE HAD OTHER INQUIRIES AND FINALLY POSED QUESTION TO BONGO HIMSELF. SHORT ANSWER WAS THAT BONGO FELT MESSAGE WOULD REOPEN MRS. BONGO'S GRIEF AND THEREFORE PRESIDENT PREFERRED THAT NO MESSAGES BE SENT.

3. DELAUNEY WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY MESSAGES FROM RESIDENT EMBASSIES INCLUDING FRENCH, NOR ARE WE. (DELAUNEY SAID GISCARD HAD EXPRESSED REGRET DURING COURSE OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH BONGO ON OTHER MATTERS.) TWO VISITING DELEGATIONS (CONGO AND MAURITANIA) HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN PRESS AS EXPRESSING THEIR
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CONDOLENCES. HE SUGGESTED THAT IN CIRCUMSTANCES IF WE WERE CONSIDERING MESSAGE, WE CAST IT ALONG LINES OF DISTRESS AT DISAPPEARANCE OF HELICOPTER, DEEP CONCERN FOR FATE OF THOSE ON BOARD, AND POSSIBLY HOPE THAT EVEN AT THIS LATE DATE, THERE MAY STILL BE GOOD NEWS.

4. DELAUNEY'S ADVISE SEEMS SOUND TO ME, AND I THEREFOR PROPOSE

NOT TO DELIVER MESSAGE REFTEL (A) UNLESS GOG OFFICIALLY DECLARES
HELICOPTER AND PASSENGERS AS LOST. IF DEPT AND WHITE HOUSE
WOULD THEN PREFER ALTERNATE FORMULA, I WOULD APPRECIATE SUG-
GESTED TEXT OR WE WILL PROVIDE ONE FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION FROM
HERE AT YOUR REQUEST. I HAVE, INCIDENTALLY, ALREADY EXPRESSED
REGRET TO BOTH PRESIDENT AND FONMIN, AND NO DOUBT COULD FIND
OPPORTUNITY NEXT TIME I SEE PRESIDENT TO EXPRESS PRESIDENT
CARTER'S DISTRESS ORALLY AS WELL IF YOU WOULD PREFER THAT ROUTE.
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